

CHARLES WILLISON JOHNSON, 1863-1932

BY ARTHUR F. GRAY

Charles Willison Johnson, Senior Curator of the Boston Society of Natural History for about thirty years, a man of clear vision and of tremendous value to the whole of New England, has passed on. An eminent scientist, well-versed in the studies of entomology, malacology and paleontology, as well as in the broader field of general natural history, he will be greatly missed not only by the local society in which he worked, but in a much larger sense by the scientific world of America.

As a specialist, he had attained an enviable reputation among his colleagues and co-workers in the branches to which he had devoted the better portion of his years.

Born at Morris Plains, Morris County, New Jersey, October 26th, 1863, the son of Albert Fletcher and Sarah (Willison) Johnson, he received his earlier education in public and private schools at Morristown, New Jersey; his later education in the higher schools of opportunity, experience and human progress. An apt scholar, he early developed a remarkable aptitude for, and keen interest in, the nature studies which were to form his principal interests and life-work.

Removing in 1880, at the age of seventeen, to St. Augustine, Florida, he became deeply interested in natural history and especially in the Tertiary deposits of the state. He made extensive collections of fossils from these beds. Here also he met Mr. Joseph Willcox, then a Trustee of the Wagner Free Institute, of Philadelphia, who was so deeply impressed with the knowledge of general natural history shown by Mr. Johnson, that he engaged him to take up the position of Curator at that institution.

While at St. Augustine, he met Dr. William H. Dall of the National Museum, who was making studies of the Tertiary deposits, and gathering material for his important work on the "Tertiary Fauna of Florida", which appeared later in the Transactions of the Wagner Free Institute of Phila-

delphia, 1890-1895. The friendship then formed continued until Dr. Dall's death.

In the latter part of 1888, we find Johnson, at the age of twenty-five, installed in his new position at the Wagner Free Institute, as Curator of a museum containing the accumulations of many years, of decidedly mixed character. This the new Curator proceeded to overhaul; much was discarded. With the remainder, which contained some very excellent material as a nucleus, he built up a museum that is extremely valuable and instructive. All of this was accomplished during a period of about fourteen years.

While resident of Philadelphia, Johnson was made Curator of the Eocene and Oligocene collection made by Dr. Isaac Lea, at the Academy of Natural Sciences. Here he became associated with Dr. Henry A. Pilsbry, Curator of Mollusca and Marine Invertebrates in the Academy. Together they made several excursions in the field, collecting Cretaceous fossils in New Jersey; and living mollusks in St. Johns River, Florida, where they spent a month together in 1894, bringing back new species which were later described in *THE NAUTILUS*. In the interest of the Academy he visited the famous beds of Eocene remains at Claiborne, Alabama, those at Jackson and Vicksburg, Miss., also many localities in Alabama, Louisiana, Texas and Arkansas. From all the beds he gathered large quantities of material, most of which he classified and labeled in the Academy's collection in Philadelphia.

In May, 1890, Johnson joined with Dr. Pilsbry in the publication of *THE NAUTILUS* as Business Manager, taking the place of W. D. Averell, who, with Pilsbry, had established the journal a year before. The choice was most fortunate; Johnson established the most cordial relations with subscribers and contributors. During extended periods, when Dr. Pilsbry was away on collecting trips, he acted as editor as well as business manager. In those days *THE NAUTILUS* was a monthly. This co-partnership and intimate friendship continued for forty-two years, until terminated by Mr. Johnson's death.

Early in 1891, Johnson visited the Island of Jamaica with Mr. William J. Fox, both collecting shells and insects. Among the land shells brought home were several that were afterwards described and published as new.

Mrs. Johnson's father, Mr. John Ford, has been an ardent collector of shells, and had accumulated a large and valuable collection, which, at his death, came into Mr. Johnson's hands. He found it particularly rich in Olividae, of which Mr. Ford had gathered lavishly. Becoming deeply interested in the family, Mr. Johnson published "Some Notes on Olividae". Boston Soc. Nat. Hist., 1910-1911. Further notes on the family appeared from time to time in THE NAUTILUS.

Following the death in 1903 of Prof. Alpheus Hyatt, who had been in charge of the museum for a long period, Mr. Johnson was called to the Boston Society of Natural History to fill the office of principal Curator. He accepted the position in the fall of that year. Arriving at Boston, he found the museum in a static condition, crowded to overflowing and sadly in need of a thorough overhauling and weeding process; he took up this work immediately. Conceiving the need of improving the New England collections, he had new and modern cases installed, and built up these departments, filling the gaps. His efforts have been crowned with great success; the museum is now in excellent condition.

A strong, earnest and active field-worker, he camped out in New Hampshire, Vermont, and other points in New England each summer. He visited Mt. Washington, the islands of Mt. Desert, Nantucket, and other important areas, building up the collection of New England insects, now without doubt the finest in existence. During his long service here in Boston he gave great attention also to the study of the New England molluscan fauna; building up a very complete series of the local shells; at the same time contributing much to our knowledge of synonymy, ecology, habits and the general distribution of New England mollusks. A summary of this work was published in the "Fauna of New England Series," No. 13 (Boston Soc. N. H., 1915).

Deeply interested in the study of insects, he became a recognized authority on the Diptera, or two-winged flies. He collected these in many and widely distributed areas, preparing extensive lists of the Diptera of Bermuda, Jamaica, New Jersey, New York, New England and Labrador. These lists have been of the greatest use to workers in this line of study. He was consulted widely, and with great frequency relative to this highly organized and often injurious group of insects. Johnson's private collection of insects is now in the Museum at Harvard University.

He was a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; a member of American Association for the Advancement of Science; of the Academy of Natural Sciences, of Philadelphia; of the Entomological Societies of America, Washington, and Cambridge; the Boston Society of Natural History; the Malacological Society of London; the Boston Malacological Club, and others.

When the Boston Malacological Club was formed in March, 1910, he was one of the organizers. He always took a great interest in its meetings, seldom being absent therefrom. He served continuously on its executive committee, and for several years as its president. The papers presented by him at its meetings have been frequent and of great interest. The accounts of his shell collecting trips, disclosed his sense of humor; his adventures and experiences during these trips were often amusing and highly entertaining.

The Club's November meeting was a memorial to Mr. Johnson, and many papers were presented relative to his various interests, his fine and lovable character, his kindness and willingness to share his fund of knowledge alike with the beginner or the highly-trained specialist; his scholarly methods of study; his great value as a Curator; and his many contributions to science. Among the speakers who paid tributes, were: Dr. Thomas Allen, William J. Clench, S. N. F. Sanford, J. Henry Blake, Prof. Francis N. Balch and Dr. Joseph Bequaert, the president. Letters were also read from Dr. Pilsbry and Dr. Fred T. Lewis. In his death the Club has lost one of its most efficient workers, a

man of unusual accomplishments, yet of extreme modesty and a kindly and affectionate spirit, a Christian gentleman, dear friend and lovable companion. The Club members will long cherish his memory.

I take the liberty of quoting a few excerpts from the letter of Dr. Lewis, whose remarks therein seemed most fitting. He says:

"The door of Mr. Johnson's room was always open. Whenever any one,—school-boy, expert, old friend or stranger—crossed the threshold his work was laid aside. His time and wealth of information were at every one's disposal. Often I have visited there, and never without learning much and developing a taste for more, as with the utmost simplicity Mr. Johnson drew upon his boundless lore of insects and mollusks. His detailed knowledge of the groups in which he was specially interested was impressive. For him there was no idle time. When absent from the Museum he was always off collecting."

Of his writings on scientific subjects Mr. Johnson apparently never kept a list. Dr. Bequaert says that his contributions on entomological topics numbered some 130 papers; and Mr. Sanford estimates that at least 100 papers were contributed on molluscan subjects. He also wrote several papers and notes relative to the fossils of the Tertiary, Cretaceous and other formations from which he had made collections.

He married at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, January 14th, 1897, Miss Carrie W. Ford, the daughter of John Ford, the well-known conchologist of that city. She died at Brookline, Mass., July 16th, 1931, about a year before the death of Mr. Johnson, which occurred after a brief illness of about three weeks' duration at his home in Brookline, on July 19th, 1932. They left no children.

Johnson was much loved and respected in the community where he had spent the greater portion of the time, since he took up his residence in Brookline. He served as a vestryman in St. Mark's Methodist Episcopal Church. Of a genial and lovable nature, the community has lost an exemplary

citizen, and we, who were his co-workers in scientific lines, a dear friend and companion.

DR. VICTOR STERKI, 1846-1933

BY STANLEY T. BROOKS, PH.D.

Dr. Victor Sterki, internationally-known as a conchologist and well-known as a protozoologist, died in his eighty-seventh year at his home in New Philadelphia, Ohio, on January the twenty-fifth.

Dr. Sterki was born at Solothurn, Switzerland, in 1846. He was the son of Anton and Magdalena Müller Sterki. His first classes were attended in the building in which his grandfather had taught for twenty-nine years. Later, after five years in high school and two years in college, he entered the University of Bern as a medical student. Before this time, however, his love for nature had been expressed in his many studies and collections of the native flora and fauna. Several "Tagebücher", written during those days, tell of his collections of plants and mollusks.

Young Victor Sterki was never robust, and at the end of his medical course suffered a long illness. The winter following was spent in Munich (University) studying the Protozoa, and in the spring of that year he took the examinations that would permit him to practice medicine. He did not obtain his M.D. degree until later.¹ After taking the examination, which he passed with highest honor, he served

¹ "In Switzerland, as well as in other European countries, the medical student has to pass a 'State Examination' which entitles him to practice as a physician. This examination has nothing to do with the 'Dr. Med.' which is solely an academic degree, and involves not the right of practice. But most physicians graduate for the title; and the universities may, under circumstances, grant the 'M.D.' to an applicant; after he has passed the state examination satisfactorily, upon a good dissertation, and the fee required, without another formal examination. As Botany and Zoology, with comparative anatomy, are comprised in the first or propaedeutic part of the examination, a dissertation on such a subject could be accepted."

These notes appeared in the introduction of his little book written in 1895 and entitled, "Notes and Observations after Twenty Years' Medical practice in the Old and New World".